DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 546 SO 010 539

AUTHOR Myers, Charles B.
TITLE "Diffusion" Does not Equal "Instructional Change."
PUB DATE 25 Nov 77
NOTE 20p.; For related documents, see SO 010 540, SO 010 542-543; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Cincinnati, Ohio, November 23-26, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adoption (Ideas); Bias; Case Studies; Cooperative Planning; Curriculum Development; *Diffusion; Educational Problems; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; *Instructional Improvement; Instructional Materials; Selection; *Social Studies; Success Factors; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Because social studies curriculum developers and diffusers are generally closer to materials than to practitioners, their efforts often fail to help teachers and school systems change in positive directions. Although the idea and process of diffusion is related to instructional change, the two terms are not synonomous. In fact, confusion of the two ideas and processes prevents many diffusion and instructional change efforts from succeeding. Reasons for the failure of diffusion efforts include that diffusion often: (1) is equated with a change agent; (2) focuses on materials rather than the teacher, instructional program, and school system; (3) is considered as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end; (4) is directed to specific rather than continuing change; (5) ignores implementation and institutionalization; and (6) is handled by consultants who are directly connected with the materials. One approach that would avoid some of these problems centers on cooperative planning efforts by social studies teachers and supervisors, school system representatives, outside change agents, and diffusers. Case studies of successful instructional change efforts include the Speedier Project in Palmyra, Pennsylvania; the Peabody Center on Economics and Social Studies Education; and the Consortium for the Improvement of Instruction in Middle Tennessee. (Author/DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED156546

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Charles B Myers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

"Diffusion" ≠ (does not equal) "Instructional Change"

A paper presented by
Charles B. Myers
Director, Programs for Educators of Youth
George Peabody College for Teachers

"Spreading the Word: Implementing Alternative Approaches to the Diffusion of Instructional Materials"

A Symposium of the
College and University Faculty Assembly
of
The National Council for the Social Studies

SP 010 539

Cincinnati, Ohio
November 25, 1977

Introduction

This paper is an eclectic set of observations, comments and suggestions about the topics of "Diffusion of Instructional Materials" and "Instructional Change". It is presented from the point of view of a practioner rather than from the perspective of a researcher. It is not intended to be a theoretical, scholarly treatise. It focuses on social studies material, teachers and instruction, but the main points are probably appropriate for all types of instruction at the elementary and secondary levels.

My comments are primarily reflections of experiences over the past ten years in roles that have dealt with materials development and diffusion and with efforts to design models for producing and sustaining instructional change. In order to help me clarify my point of view, I want to mention those roles and experiences. They include: Social Studies Specialist for an E.S.E.A., Title III Center in South Central Pennsylvania during the era of the "new social studies" of the late 1960's; consultant to school systems concerning specific social studies materials and teaching strategies, as well as on strategies for bringing about instructional change; author and general editor of The Taba Program in Social Science; college instructor in social studies education; college administrator charged with the responsibility of reorganizing the college's secondary education program to make it more responsive to the needs of teachers and school systems; and designer of the newly established Peabody Center on Economic and Social Studies Education.

I mention these roles and experiences because I want to deal with more than "Approaches to the Diffusion of Instructional Materials". Frankly, I think the topic of this symposium shows a curriculum developer's bias, a bias that has had harmful effects on the process of instructional change in the social studies

over the past ten years. That bias has led many of us to ask the wrong questions and to emphasize the wrong parts of the complicated process of instructional change. I want to try and break out of that conceptual framework.

Maybe I can illustrate my point by referring to several questions that are often raised by curriculum materials developers, diffusers of those materials and instructional change agents. Developers and diffusers seem to focus on the question, How do we get these materials (often materials developed by themselves and/or their colleagues) into those social studies classrooms? It is significant that the people who raise this question usually think of themselves as being closer to the materials to be diffused than to the teachers and school systems they hope will use them. In fact, the whole essence of the diffusion idea is to "spread the word," as the title of this symposium states. "The word" is the materials to be diffused. I think a better question, one that is less biased in this sense, is, How do we help teachers and school systems do a better job in using social studies materials to educate their students? In other words, How do we help teachers and school systems change for the better? These two questions focus primarily not on materials to be diffused but on the teachers, the instructional program and the school system to be changed.

The main points of this paper are: (1) the idea and process of "diffusion" are not the same as the idea and process of "instructional change" and (2) the confusion of the two ideas and processes prevents many diffusion efforts and many efforts at producing instructional change from succeeding. This is not to say, however, that diffusion and instructional change efforts are not compatible. In fact, both processes, if they are to be successful, must involve elements of the other. I simply think that we have over emphasized the "diffusion" notion

at the expense of the other steps necessary in processes of instructional change.

In the remainder of the paper, I want to do the following:

(1) list what I think are some of the reasons why many diffusion efforts fail to produce significant instructional change

(2) propose an approach that I think avoids some of these "errors"

(3) describe briefly three efforts in which I have been involved that have attempted to incorporate the suggestions I propose.

Before doing this, one more preliminary comment is in order. Almost invariably, when the points I want to raise in this paper are mentioned in groups of diffusers and instructional change agents, a common response is, "You are not saying anything different from what we are trying to do". That statement is probably valid most of the time, but there is an eye-opening phrase in the statement that should be stressed -- what we are trying to do. Often in discussions about diffusion projects and instructional change efforts, as well as in the undertakings themselves, we confuse what we are trying to do or what we say we are doing with what we are doing. We assume our desires and our perceptions are the same as our real impact. They are not. And, the difference is more than semantic.

Reasons Diffusion Efforts Fail

Point One The process of diffusion of instructional materials is only one part of the more complex and longer-term process of instructional change. However, when many of us use the term "diffusion" we mean the whole process of taking a set of materials and using them to change what is taught, how a teacher teaches, what kids do in a classroom and how a school system goes about "updating" its

social studies program. If we think the diffusion of instructional materials can do all of this, we are making a grave mistake. Efforts based on this confusion about the nature of the processes of diffusion and instructional change will rarely succeed. They simply place too much responsibility at the feet of the diffuser.

An example of the confusion between diffusion and instructional change (or even the broader term educational change) is reflected in the Introduction to the "Wingspread Workbook for Educational Change Agents". A publication written by leaders of the diffusion idea in social studies education. The Introduction reads as follows:

> "Change in Schools
>
> Today schools are frequently taken to task for their failure to deal with racism, sexism, and poverty. Schools are denounced by students and social critics alike for their lack of relevance to the problems and life situations facing us. Some critics have advocated "deschooling" society and others demand educators to be held accountable to the public for demonstrable student learning.
>
> Pleas for change, however, have not been accompanied by practical suggestions on how to accomplish these goals. School systems have received little help in developing methods of successfully choosing, trying out, and implementing new educational materials and practices. There is a considerable body of research and theory on educational change, and there are some excellent summaries of such information. (See, for instance,

Rogers and Shoemaker 1971; Havelock, Huber, and Zimmerman 1969; Havelock 1971; Miles 1964.) But these writings are generally more useful to the social scientist than to the educational practitioner. The gap between the researcher/developer and the practitioner is especially evident in discussions of how schools became aware of, decide to try, and adopt, adapt, or reject new materials and practices.

> This workbook represents an attempt to reduce this gap by detailing effective and appropriate ways of introducing and maintaing new products, practices, and programs in the schools. It is based on the premise that the new ideas growing out of research and development will have little positive impact until more school personnel are aware of them, are willing and able to try them, and are skilled in creating conditions that make likely their implementation."[1]

Note the shift of ideas from the first paragraph to the second. What does "these goals" mean at the end of the first sentence in paragraph two? How significant is the shift from the school goals concerning racism, sexism, poverty and relevance in paragraph one to the narrower focus on "materials and practices" in paragraph two? Is it important that "change agent" and "diffuser" are interchanged in the workbook, as if they were synonymous.

I agree that good diffusers of instructional materials are educational change agents, but educational change agents are not necessarily diffusers of

[1] James M. Becker and Carole L. Hahn, Wingspread Workbook for Educational Change Agents (Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Education Consortium, Inc. 1975), p.3.

instructional materials. I would also submit that diffusers are successful in having materials accepted, adopted, adapted, and implemented on a continuing basis in classrooms only when they are also successful instructional change agents in the broader sense of the term.

Point Two The concept of diffusion places the focus of instructional change on the materials being diffused and on the process by which they get from the developer to the potential buyer instead of on the teacher, the instructional program and the school system needing change. In fact, good diffusers usually list as conditions necessary for successful diffusion things such as awareness of alternatives, openness to new ideas, willingness to experiment, system support for innovation and so forth. I believe these are more than necessary conditions. They are part of the diffusion and instructional change processes. They are the essense of instructional change.

It seems to me that this is where the idea of diffusion becomes most harmful to the process of instructional change. Frankly, I wish we wouldn't use the term. Diffusion starts with products and gets them used in the classrooms. I think all forms of instructional change that deal directly with teachers and classrooms should start with what kids are learning, what is happening to them in the classroom, and what the teachers are doing. It should build from this point to what teachers and school decision makers think would be better learning and better instruction. Changes in this mode would, no doubt, involve the use of materials diffused from somewhere, but the emphasis would be on changes in students, teachers, the learning process in the specfic classrooms and the school system as an institution.

Support for shifting the focus of instructional change from the materials being used to the teaching-learning process is presented by two research conclusions that are repeated so often that they are accepted almost as truisms. One states that the teacher and what the teacher does with students in the classroom are the most significant variables in the teaching-learning process; the other states that the enthusiasm and skill of teachers using new materials are more important for student achievement than the quality of the materials used.

Point Three Materials that are being diffused should be used as vehicles for desired changes in teachers, school systems and student learning. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

Before we say "of course" to this, think about diffusion efforts in which you have been involved. Were goals set in terms of the expected changed behavior of teachers and students? Were these expected behaviors written without reference to the materials to be used? Was the goal the adoption of the new materials? Did the outside experts who came to the school system to help with the process know anything about the local system and teachers? Were specific goals for teachers more comprehensive than those needed to get them to use the new product?

If materials are thought of as vehicles for change, they are used differently from when they are the main focus of a diffusion effort. As vehicles for change, the materials are used at times and in ways that are expected to affect the teaching-learning process in predetermined ways. The primary change agents make these determinations based on what they want to have happen to the teachers and students and what they know about the whole situation.

Point Four Any significant change in instruction should provide for continuing change. It should build an orientation toward experimentation, an acceptance of new ideas, and a value perspective that is consistent with education in an increasingly changing world. One step changes are not appropriate and change efforts that have as their goal the adoption of a particular curriculum package tend to involve only one step.

However, this weakness in diffusion efforts can be overcome if the diffusion process is designed to accomplish the goals of (1) providing experiences for the educators involved so they will develop a more open acceptance of instructional change and (2) developing rather permanent channels for delivering other "new" sets of materials in the future. In this context, adoption of the specific product being used as a "vehicle for change" at a particular point in time is of secondary importance.

Point Five To be successful, diffusion efforts, as well as all instructional change efforts, must devote significant thought and energy to the implementation and institutionalization phases of the process. These phases require continuous support for and follow-up with the teachers involved. They require close and highly affective contact between the change agents (diffuser) and the teachers. Such help must be easy to obtain and non-threatening. It must be provided locally and be authorized and legitimatized by the school system. However, the help does not have to be provided by permanent employees of the participating school system and probably should not be provided solely by them. In fact, supervisory and administrative personnel are often inappropriate in these roles.

Point Six The key actors in the implementation and institutionalization phases of instructional change processes are different types of people who play co-

operating roles -- the local instructional supervisor and an outside "change agent" consultant who is not tied to the materials being reviewed or adopted.

The local supervisor role might be played by a director of instruction, a general supervisor, a social studies supervisor, a building principal who is seen as an instructional leader, or a department chairperson. This person must know the teachers and the instructional operation of the school system. He or she must be able to set the goals for the instructional change process in terms of how it would affect the people and the system involved. He or she must be able to select the appropriate materials to be used so that their use produces the anticipated results in the teachers and their students.

The outside consultant can be any one of a number of people who possess the knowledge and skills to function as an instructional change agent in the specific situation. It is also important that the person selected for this role be readily available to local participants. The knowledge and skills of the people in these two roles determines if additional experts are needed as consultants.

Point Seven Generally, developers do not make good implementors. In a diffusion process, the location at which the hoped-for action is to take place is in the classroom of the schools where the diffused product is to be used. The significant developmental activity (the making of the product) has already taken place. Therefore, the developers no longer have the major role in the process. They need to be available to provide information and to conduct workshops for the teachers, but someone else must decide when and how to use them.

The term "diffuser" implies the notion of the sending out of materials to school systems and teachers and persuading them to use them. It is almost a

marketing function, an extension of the development of the materials. There are incongruities between this function and the implementation and institutionalization tasks. More than helping the teachers to use the materials correctly is needed.

This point gets at the heart of the diffusion process -- the personal and institutional goals of the people involved. I simply cannot believe that people who have a direct financial interest in one set of materials or who have invested years of effort and much pride of authorship in a specific social studies program can say with conviction that their materials are only one of the many that could be used or that they should be used only temporarily, while a school system looks for something better.

Point Eight A different type of instructional change agent role from that of a "diffuser", as we have been describing the concept, is needed -- the outside change agent. The people who fill this different role cannot be tied to the product being used as a vehicle for change. They must do more than diffuse. Most importantly, they must help plan and implement an instructional change process under the direction of and in response to the school system where the change is to take place. They must communicate between developers and users of the materials. They must translate ideas as they pass them back and forth.

At the same time, these outside change agents cannot be direct supervisors of the teachers involved. They must see the process of instructional change as an endeavor to help people change. They must be consultants to experimenting teachers who need support and security as they risk trying something different. School system supervisors already have too many roles that conflict with this function. Usually, they have too much at stake personally in the change process

to avoid pushing too hard, too fast. Besides, they simply do not have the time to do it without outside help.

The function of the outside change agent can be performed by a wide variety of individuals who are employed by the participating school system as consultants to undertake the task. The important qualifications are interest in the change to be implemented, skill as a change agent, proximity to where the change is to occur, availability, and the absence of conflicting goals. Often these change agent roles are filled by college instructors in the local area.

In recent years, free-standing social studies education agencies, such as the Social Science Education Consortium, have helped identify people to provide this service. This type of agency and the people it identifies seems to be in the best position to provide the outside change agent services, unencumbered by other conflicting interests and pressures. Outside the limited context of social studies, free-standing organizations, such as the New England Program in Teacher Education, and agencies of state governments, such as the Education Agencies in Texas and the Intermediate Units in Pennsylvania, seem to provide the service effectively, as do various Teacher Center operations.

An Instructional Change Model

I believe effective models of instructional change must focus on the teachers and the school system that are expected to change. The diffuser role has a place but it is not dominant.

My model includes the following actors: the teachers and other educators who are expected to change, the school system, the inside change agent (usually a local instructional leader such as a social studies supervisor, director of

instruction, or department chairperson), the outside change agent, and the source of "new" instructional materials and ideas (the diffuser). The process begins when the inside change agent and an outside change agent agree to work together to produce some desired change. One of these becomes the primary change agent for the effort, depending on the amount of time and energy each is expected to commit to the project, the tasks that are identified for each, local conditions and personalities.

These two people, often working with others, plan the change process, set the goals, gain authorization to carry out their plans, choose other consultants, and select the "new" materials and ideas they want to use as vehicles for change. If the vehicle for change is a curriculum package or "new" course of some type, they plan the introduction of the materials over an extended period of time, beginning with activities that make the target group of teachers aware of the materials and ending with institutionalization of the use of the materials or, if the materials are rejected by the teachers, institutionalization of an alternative program.

Such a process contains the steps common to most processes that are intended to produce change in people, including some or all of the following: orientation, acceptance of the idea of change, experimentation, adoption, adaption, implementation and institutionalization. Delineating each of these steps goes beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to stress that the process is long and complex and that it must be monitored and guided carefully.

Other critical characteristics are: teachers must participate voluntarily and feel free to opt out at any time; all participants must be rewarded for their participation and be made to feel as secure as possible; the timetable and design

must be flexible but visable to everyone; help and understanding must be readily available; and a firm trust relationship among all participants must be developed. It should also be mentioned that this process begins with one group of volunteer teachers, provides as much help as is necessary to assure success, and then adds others as they volunteer to join the successful operation. Nowhere in the process is the adoption of one set of materials considered the end goal.

A general picture of the model in operation might look something like this. The two change agents work with a target group of volunteer teachers to pilot a set of materials over the length of a school year. The purposes are to develop new teacher skills, introduce new materials and build an open orientation to change. The two leaders conduct inservice workshops during the year, with the assistance of diffusers or others who have worked with the materials, to help the pilot teachers use the materials appropriately. As the pilot program progresses, the change agents visit classrooms, meet with teachers during planning periods and at the end of the school day, and provide help when needed. Periodically, the entire process is analyzed and adjusted.

In this model, the diffuser provides instruction about the materials used for the pilot, and the teaching strategies contained in them, visits classrooms to provide support and asistance to the pilot teachers, and serves as an advisor to others guiding the process. It is possible that the person who plays the diffuser role may also be the outside change agent, but this can be done successfully only when the person understands that he or she is playing two roles, can perform both adequately, and allows the broader change agent role to be the more prominent one. In short, this person must see the materials as means to change teachers and improve instruction, not as products to be adopted

by consumers. Instead of diffusing or sending out materials, the agent brings them to the teachers being helped.

The main characteristics of this model appear in the general design of a number of E.S.E.A. Title III and Title IV, C projects, as well as in many of the newer Teacher Center efforts. Often Teacher Corps designs also reflect the same characteristics but Teacher Corps concerns in the areas of parity and multicultural tend to obscure these elements. Examples of well known efforts at instructional change that incorporate fewer of the characteristics are NDEA Institutes, economic education summer workshops, and the diffusion projects that followed a number of the "new social studies" materials development projects of Project Social Studies.

Instructional Change (diffusion?) Efforts

Below are brief descriptions of change agent efforts that include a diffusion function and many of the characteristics mentioned above. It is impossible to present here much detail about each effort and to note the particular successes or failures of each. Additional information can be provided to those who may be interested.

Speedier Project In the late 1960's, the Speedier Project, located in Palmyra, Pennsylvania, had as its general purpose the helping of teachers in fifty-two area school systems "teach better". It was funded for three years at about $250,000 a year under Title III. The main thrust of its social studies component was to develop "pilots" of new materials that were being developed by the Project Social Studies projects throughout the United States. In one sense the project was a diffusion effort. However, its emphasis was not on getting programs into classrooms as much as it was on changing the teachers and school systems who agreed to try one of the

new programs for a year.

Once school systems and teachers volunteered to participate in a particular pilot, a written agreement was drafted, stating the commitments made by the different organizations and individuals and listing the ways in which the teachers, the social studies programs in their schools, and the school systems were expected to be different at the end of that year. Workshops ranging in total length from 15 to 60 hours of training, depending on the materials being piloted, were conducted on school time during the year, and staff members were assigned to observe and advise each participating teacher at least once a month. These staff consultants and the workshop leaders also demonstrated the teaching of the pilot materials in participating teachers' classrooms. Their main functions were to provide support for the pilot teachers, to assure success of the pilot, and to push for significant change in pilot participants at all levels.

Each pilot was coordinated by a staff member who worked with an outside consultant (diffuser) who had helped develop the materials and/or had taught them previously. These people used the materials as "vehicles for change". Piloting them became the immediate challange but the goals of the effort were always stated in terms of how the piloting experience would change the teachers, the instructional program and the school system.

By the end of the second full year of operation, 23 school systems and several hundred teachers had been significantly involved in at least one social studies pilot and more teachers and systems wanted to be added to pilots than could be accommodated. In that time, nearly twenty systems began a thorough reorganization of their social studies program at some level, although none had anticipated doing so before the pilots started. Virtually all of the participa-

ting systems began a study of the teaching strategies used by their teachers (This was at the height of the "age of inquiry teaching" and the pilot materials incorporated these strategies.). Five systems expanded their inservice education programs as a result of pilot participation.

At the end of the federal government funding, the state of Pennsylvania offered to provide $100,000 per year to continue project operations and participating school systems agreed to pay one dollar per student to continue to be involved. Although the social studies pilots were not the only component of the Speedier Project, they did have the largest teacher and school system involvement of all project activities and were largely responsible for the continuation of the Project's operation.

Peabody Center on Economics and Social Studies Education The Peabody Center is an endowed component of George Peabody College for Teachers that became operational on September 1, 1977. Its goals are to work directly with teachers, school systems and community leaders to improve instruction in economics and the other areas of social studies by:

-Training teachers in sophisticated teaching strategies that make economic and social studies instruction more effective;

-Developing systematic plans for individual school systems which will promote changes in economic instruction and will successfully institutionalize these changes;

-Providing long-term consultation to participating teachers and school systems as they develop new programs of instructions;

-Creating opportunities for leaders from the fields of business, economics, and education to participate in symposia on current topics in economic and social studies education.

-Providing a wide range of quality teaching materials and resources from business and industry to participating teachers and school systems;

-Guiding educators in the review of materials and the implementation of materials in classrooms;

-Promoting quality economic instruction within a broad interdisciplinary context so that all aspects of responsible citizenship may be stressed.

One of the major ways of providing these activities involve the "diffusion" of materials from many sources but always emphasizing how the use of the materials changes the people involved. Pilot projects (as mentioned above) and extended workshops for academic credit will be primary means to accomplish Center objectives.

Consortium for the Improvement of Instruction in Middle Tennessee This organization is in the process of being formed, and should be approved by 20-25 public school systems and private schools on December 14, 1977. It will operate on a model similar to that outlined in the proposed regulations for federal government funded Teacher Centers. However, it will not function at a single location and will provide more "substantive" instruction then is envisioned by some teacher center developers. It will not be limited to social studies.

The main objectives of the Consortium are stated as follows:

To improve the quality of instruction provided students in the smaller (small city and county) school systems and private schools of Middle Tennessee by providing instruction and other staff development activities for their teachers. Such activities will be developed in response to needs identified by the teachers to be served and their administrators and will be provided at locations easily accessible to the participants.

Key characteristics of this model include a predominant role for classroom teachers in setting priorties and planning activities, the building of activities on identified needs of the people to be affected, and the focus on providing new information and skills for teachers. It is possible that a diffusion function,

as discussed in this paper, may be a significant element in the Consortium's undertakings but, at this point, that function is only one of the options that Consortium decision-makers have at their disposal as they identify means to effect the changes they desired. It is an option because I helped design the Consortium and, in doing so, built it into the design. But, I must admit that I am not at all sure that the option is necessary or appropriate. If the decision were only mine to make, I would use the diffusion of materials as vehicles for carrying out the desired change. But such a decision would be based on my past experiences and biases.